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## Viewing cable 09NICOSIA194, EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGIONAL STRATEGIC

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
<a href="#">09NICOSIA194</a>	<a href="#">2009-03-19 12:14</a>	<a href="#">2011-08-30 01:44</a>	<a href="#">SECRET</a>	<a href="#">Embassy Nicosia</a>

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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 NICOSIA 000194

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/17/2019  
TAGS: [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [ASEC](#) [GR](#) [TU](#) [CY](#)  
SUBJECT: EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGIONAL STRATEGIC  
INITIATIVE (RSI) CHIEFS OF MISSION MEETING, FEBRUARY 24,  
2009

Classified By: Ambassador Frank C. Urbancic for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

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11. (C) Meeting in Nicosia February 24, U.S. Ambassadors and

interagency representatives covering the Eastern Mediterranean RSI region discussed ways to strengthen counterterrorism efforts in an environment characterized by new migration waves from the Middle East to Europe, the aftermath of the Israeli operation in Gaza, best practices developed to date for countering violent extremism, and the potential for new developments in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and the international community's relationship to Syria. Participants agreed on the desirability of bundling regional projects--including current proposals for U.S. law enforcement training in a number of Eastern Med countries--in order both to maximize the return on our investment and to build a stronger regional base for combating transnational threats. Participants also discussed the most effective ways to reach populations at risk of radicalization as well as other audiences, with an emphasis on thinking through messaging strategies in advance of potential changes in the international context. End Summary.

#### The Migration Challenge in the Region

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12. (C) The meeting, hosted by Ambassador Urbancic and Embassy Nicosia, was attended by U.S. Embassies Athens, Sofia, Ankara, Beirut, Amman, Tel Aviv, Cairo, the Consulate General in Jerusalem, interagency representatives from State (S/CT, DS, and INR), Justice, DHS, Treasury, USAID, the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), and DOD COCOMs (SOCOM, CENTCOM, and EUCOM), as well as UK FCO Counterterrorism Director Robert Chatterton Dixon. Embassy Damascus was unable to attend. S/CT Coordinator Dailey launched the discussion by noting the importance of thinking regionally or sub-regionally to identify problems and possible solutions. Several Ambassadors quickly provided an example: the cross-cutting problem of illegal migration. Ambassador Speckhard (Greece) stressed the importance of a multinational solution, incorporating all countries on the migration route in an effort to manage flows and identify terrorists. He noted that Greece had been particularly hard hit, with over 140,000 illegal migrants in 2008, many of whom came from conflict zones in the Middle East and transited Turkey before entering Greece. He called for creating a searchable biometric database of known terrorists that could be put in the hands of border officials, stressing that the EU should be more active of support of EU front line states.

13. (C) Ambassador Urbancic (Cyprus) added that Cyprus shared the same migration problems. He said that although the numbers were lower, the risk was exacerbated by the lack of border enforcement against illegal aliens who enter Cyprus in the areas administered by Turkish Cypriots and then cross the Green Line, the UN-patrolled buffer zone, into the Republic of Cyprus and the EU. Noting that half of the people who take the ferry from Syria to Turkish Cypriot-administered northern Cyprus do not go back -- not to mention those who arrive in the north on small boats -- Urbancic warned that this "back door" to Europe was almost totally open. Embassy Sofia DCM Karagiannis said Bulgaria was increasingly facing illegal migration challenges as well, and that while the country had not received funding from the EU to address migration, it had imported EU requirements that made enforcement more difficult.

#### Building Capacity of Law Enforcement

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14. (S) Ambassador Dailey announced that he expected larger budgets for a number of counterterrorism programs, including Anti-Terrorism Assistance (ATA), countering terrorist finance, TIP-PISCES, and RSI. The PISCES increase would expand the software program to supplement the current name-based records with biometric information. A number of participants stressed the importance of biometric information to make any database effective. Dailey noted that S/CT would soon be traveling to Jordan in connection with a conference on this subject, and said he would be in touch with other

Eastern Med posts about the possibility of expanding the PISCES program geographically. DOD participants described ongoing efforts to make PISCES compatible with other intelligence-derived bio databases, and expressed hope that this would open the door to law enforcement doing real-time

NICOSIA 00000194 002 OF 003

checks of suspect individuals against this data in the field.

DHS DAS Warrick described the Passenger Name Record (PNR) and related initiatives to identify air travelers, and U.S. efforts with the EU and Turkey to improve cooperation.

15. (C) A number of Eastern Med embassies have recently submitted overlapping requests for law enforcement training, much of it with DS/ATA. Cyprus, Greece, Bulgaria, Jordan, and Lebanon, among others, share problems related to illegal migration and/or limited local capacity. Ambassador Speckhard noted that Greece faces the threat of both transnational terrorist networks who could make use of the migration waves and an increasingly violent home-grown terrorist presence. Both categories are anti-American and they could potentially cooperate with each other. Those posts with current ATA programs spoke favorably of their effectiveness, and ConGen Jerusalem added that it hoped to expand the programs beyond the Palestinian Authority's Presidential Guard. Ambassador Sison (Lebanon) said there is political will in Lebanon to tackle certain Sunni extremist groups, as has been recently demonstrated, even if there is none for taking on Hizballah or certain Palestinian rejectionist groups. She also cited section 1207 and INL funding for community policing of the Nahr al-Bared Palestinian refugee camp once it re-opens as an example of feasible ways to conduct counterterrorism and countering violent extremism (CVE) training in Lebanon. Amman DCM Mandel noted the extensive regional law enforcement training taking place in Jordan, and the Jordanians' active approach and willingness to expand training in a number of counterterrorism areas.

16. (C) Ambassador Dailey pointed to the Nicosia, ATA-funded law enforcement training proposal as an example of effectively drawing together multiple countries in the region, and all participants agreed on the value of bundling such proposals into regional or sub-regional packages. Ambassador Speckhard noted that posts may be able to develop a strategy for framing training programs when presenting them to host governments, in order to help senior leadership understand the goals of the programs and undertake institutional reforms to make the training stick. DS/ATA Deputy Director Tibbetts welcomed the idea. DOJ OPDAT Director Berman briefed on plans for a model two-year program to bring together a group of officials from Eastern Mediterranean countries for counter-terrorism training and exercises.

#### Countering Violent Extremism (CVE)

17. (S) S/CT Strategic Communications Officer Goldman briefed the group on best practices and current programs for CVE, including addressing the grievances terrorists exploit. Several Embassies and ConGen Jerusalem expressed interest in expanded CVE work. USAID's Cairo-based OMEP Director Barth stressed the importance of understanding "routes to terror," including alienation, and how to deal with them by reaching out to youth and facilitating social networks. S/CT officials cited the new women's organization Sisters Against Violent Extremism (SAVE) as a promising example. RADM Tillotson (CENTCOM) offered a preview of the conclusions of the Joint Strategic Assessment Team (JSAT), noting that they would have a strong focus on CVE -- including understanding causes and synchronizing efforts -- as well as strengthening partner nations' counterterrorism laws and capacity building. Tillotson also stressed the importance of interagency cooperation in measuring the success of CVE efforts, while

NCTC Admiral Maguire said work was ongoing within the Administration on CVE and messaging for dealing with different environments. Ambassador Dailey asked participants to think through potential messaging strategies in the event the situation in the Middle East shifted, including if there was progress on the peace process or a change in U.S. relations with Syria.

#### Prospects in the Middle East

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18. (C) Middle Eastern posts briefed on the situation following the Israeli operation in Gaza, with Tel Aviv PolCouns Sievers saying the two options in Gaza were the Egyptian-negotiated cease-fire, including stopping the smuggling of weapons and re-opening of the border crossing with Egypt, or Israel returning to Gaza to destroy the Hamas regime. A consensus of participants believed that Hamas had lost popularity in Gaza, but it was unclear what alternatives existed because no one would want to rule Gaza, including Fatah, if the scenario made it look like the Israelis had

NICOSIA 00000194 003 OF 003

installed Fatah in power, according to the ConGen Jerusalem representative. Ambassador Sison said that Hizballah remained strong in Lebanon, and was viewed as the "resistance" rather than a terrorist organization by more than just the country's one-third Shia population. Sison noted that key Lebanese leaders are interested in overturning the past precedent of not policing Palestinian refugee camps and in shutting down the existing armed Palestinian military bases in Lebanon (the latter being suspected conduits for smuggling to Hizballah). These moves would be in U.S. interests as well -- and the re-opening of Nahr al-Bared could be a step in that direction. Several participants stressed the role of Iran as primary financial backer of Hizballah and other extremist groups, although Sison noted that Iran's "train-the-trainer" efforts had significantly improved Hizballah's capacity to administer its own affairs.

#### Kongra Gel (PKK)

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19. (S) Ambassador Dailey told participants that S/CT Deputy Coordinator Schlicher would soon travel to key capitals to share declassified information about PKK financial networks. Ankara PolCouns O'Grady said this would be welcomed by Turkey, which is concerned that European capitals are turning a blind eye to the PKK's funding and criminal acts. O'Grady reviewed the elements of Turkey's approach to the Kurdish region, and said upcoming local elections would be an indication of how well the ruling party's efforts have succeeded there.

#### Next Steps

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10. (S) Participants agreed on the following steps coming out of the meeting:

-- Move ahead with bundling regional law enforcement training proposals, especially those already submitted by several posts. Consider options for a DS/ATA assessment team, likely to visit Cyprus in the summer, to also conduct an assessment in Greece on the same trip. Look for opportunities to do multi-country training sessions. Embassies will negotiate with host countries on receptiveness.

-- Coordination between S/CT, Embassy Athens and other relevant posts about options for expanding the PISCES program.

-- Look for further opportunities for CVE efforts, including putting the SAVE organization in contact with Greek Foreign Ministry organizers of a planned women against

terrorism conference.

-- Ensure strong interagency participation in an upcoming June 3-5 conference in Istanbul on sharing best practices for preventing terrorist travel in the region. Participants will include Eastern Med countries, the EU, and others, with input to be sought from posts.

-- Engage with EU counterparts on the PKK, including during the upcoming Schlicher trip.

-- Continue to work on turning the multi-country DOJ program into a reality, dealing with country arrangements, site, and other issues.

-- Synchronize CENTCOM JSAT assessment with priorities of National Intelligence Program (NIP).

-- Resolve outstanding DS security issues related to VIP visits to the region, including possible DS re-engagement in Gaza.

-- Engage the Government of Turkey to encourage their acceptance of an Advanced Passenger Information/Passenger Name Record system.

¶11. (SBU) Athens volunteered to host the next RSI meeting. Ambassador Dailey proposed including a short time early in the next RSI meeting for separate smaller-group discussions focused on the northern and southern halves of the Eastern Med region.

¶12. (U) This cable has been cleared by S/CT Ambassador Dailey.

Urbancic